

# Study shows groundwater contamination from PWT

The Environmental Protection Agency has released a study on Pacific Wood Treating Corporation that says the shallow and deep aquifers below the facility are contaminated with wood treating chemicals.

A Resource Conservation and Recovery Act preliminary assessment on the Ridgefield-based business was conducted between March and August 1990. The study was completed in February.

Sylvia Burges, an environmental engineer with the EPA, said the contamination to the groundwater has been suspected for "sometime." Delays in assessing the facility, she said, probably stem from prioritization of projects and limited funding.

PWT treats specialty wood products with various chemicals. Typical products include power poles, pilings, tent poles and playground equipment.

The document states that two separate groundwater studies indicate that both the shallow and deep aquifers beneath PWT are contaminated with "wood treating constituents." Those constituents include PCP in the parts per million level, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and heavy metals, most notably arsenic.

Contamination is resulting from past as well as current practices, the study concludes.

Burges said the contamination appears to pose no threat to nearby residents.

"We have not seen anything to show that we need immediate measures to protect human health and the environment," she said. "As far as we know, there's no reason for residents to be alarmed."

Greg Niedermeyer, whose family owns substantial stock in PWT, said the company purchased equipment and filters to begin cleanup of the contaminants three years ago. However, the company has been waiting on permits from the federal agency to begin actual cleanup.

Niedermeyer praised the operation at PWT.

"We have the most sophisticated treatment plant in the world to handle the material we're dealing with," he said. "We have consistently attempted to be ahead of the techniques developed by EPA and lead the way."

Groundwater under PWT appears to be moving toward the river, helping reduce any health threats.

However, groundwater from one portion of the site appears to move toward Carty Lake in the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. If that's the case, Burges said PWT may be posing an environmental hazard.

Additional study is needed of the business to determine

the extent of the contamination.

To that end, Burges said the EPA has presented PWT with a draft order, which states what the agency would like to see accomplished in an investigation of the problem.

The EPA is in the process of negotiating with the company on what the order would entail, she said.

"The company has been quite cooperative," Burges

said. "They've expressed a definite interest in going ahead with the appropriate corrective action. They've also indicated they have no interest in operating the facility if it's in violation of the wood treater regs."

Burges said she expects some action will be required to clean up the contamination.

While some of the contamination has resulted from past practices, Burges said current

practices also contribute to

Those practices include some dripping while the wood is transferred to storage areas that come out of the ground.

Burges said it will take time to clean up the contamination, but it will cost a lot of money.

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While some of the contamination has resulted from past practices, Burges said current

practices are continuing to contribute to the problem.

Those practices include some drippage that occurs while the treated logs are transferred from a tram to the storage area and substances that come off the logs while they are in storage.

Burges said contamination of groundwater can be difficult to clean up. She said it takes time to complete and can often cost a lot of money.

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